

NASA Workforce Planning Community of Practice Overview

Why does NASA need a Workforce Planning Community of Practice?

In the current environment of changing mission requirements at NASA, combined with budget constraints and full cost accounting, the workforce planning function at the Agency is faced with more complex questions than ever before. Getting good answers to these questions will require workforce-planning professionals to integrate quantities of data, and coordinate decisions made at multiple levels of their organizations.

Yet, as the workforce planning profession grows more complex, the professionals themselves are only loosely connected to each other. They are distributed across Centers and functional boundaries and, apart from specific Agency-wide initiatives, have no obvious forum for reaching out to each other ...for insight or guidance, or to solve problems they undoubtedly share. Establishing a workforce planning Community of Practice is one way to provide that forum.

What is a Community of Practice?

As recent literature attests, public and private sectors are experiencing a growth in the number and success of Communities of Practice, informal organizations of people who share common interests and pursuits and have an interest in communicating actively with each other. These communities supplement other, more formal organizational structures but, unlike them, are voluntary and self governing. Communities of Practice spring up for a number of purposes, including problem solving, educating, and sharing ideas, and often evolve over time as the issues addressed change, the community's practices get more refined, and new members join.

What are the objectives of a Community of Practice?

In keeping with the voluntary and self-governing nature of Communities of Practice, the community's members define the charter and objectives; indeed, this task is a next step for NASA's workforce planning community. To date, NASA's workforce planners have expressed a desire to use the newly-formed Community of Practice to build capability of its members, share successful practices, and leverage the group's experience to address issues shared by Centers.

What are the next steps of this Community of Practice?

A volunteer group of workforce planning professionals has formed a 'core team' to help get the community started. A top priority of this group is to define the Community's charter and an initial set of objectives, and establish how the community should operate. Members have already identified a ready-made website as a communication vehicle and will begin posting shareable information for the community, such as a contact directory and outputs from the recent workforce planning workshop. Further, members of the community have identified an early problem solving exercise in the budgeting area for the community to tackle that can serve as a concrete example of the Community of Practice "in practice".